

07-22-04

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2005

HON. DAVID R. OBEY

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 22, 2004

Mr. Chairman, I would simply observe that no two people in this House have worked harder to keep partisanship or any other illegitimate consideration out of this issue than have the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. Knollenberg) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Edwards). They have proceeded in tandem to try to produce concrete, as opposed to theoretical, results for the military families in this country who are deserving of a decent place to live.

But what we are being faced with is this: my mentor in this House, when I first came, was Dick Bolling from Missouri who for many years served this House in spectacular fashion on the Committee on Rules, and he often told me that the greatest enemy to true legislative progress was what he called "cedung hill politics." By that he meant Members being more interested in preserving the jurisdiction of their committee or the narrow interest that was associated with a committee or subcommittee, rather than focusing on the broader interests of the American people who we are supposed to serve.

It seems to me that this discussion tonight is an example of what Dick Bolling was worried about because what we have going here, as I said yesterday, is a charade.

The gentleman from Michigan and the gentleman from Texas have brought to the floor a bill which provides concrete assurances that at least 24,000 more military families will receive decent housing; but apparently the Committee on the Budget is unhappy, at least the chairman of the Committee on the Budget is unhappy, with the way the committee has gone about this; and so he intends, as I understand it, shortly to exercise a point of order which will strike from this bill the Congress' ability to deliver that housing to those military families.

In order to create an impression that these families are not being hurt, it appears that what the House will now hide behind is a motion taken yesterday to try to increase the authorization for this program, which would have the result, if the bill was enacted into law, of accomplishing the very same thing that is being accomplished by this bill. The problem is the way this Congress works, there is absolutely no assurance that a freestanding, independent authorization bill will go anywhere in the other body; and that is why, if you want to preserve that housing for those members, it is essential to keep this language in this bill.

That is what the gentleman from Michigan has been trying to do. That is what the gentleman from Texas has been trying to do on a bipartisan basis, and we ought to be supporting that effort rather than finding technicalities as reasons to deep-six the very fine work that they have attempted to do.

MOTION TO RECOMMIT OFFERED BY MR. OBEY

The Clerk read as follows:

Mr. Obey moves to recommit the bill, H.R. 4837, to the Committee on Appropriations with

instructions to report the bill promptly with an amendment increasing from \$850,000,000 to \$1,300,000,000 the limitation on military family housing privatization programs in 10 U.S.C. 2883(g)(1).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. Obey) is recognized for 5 minutes on his motion.

Mr. Speaker, this is the last opportunity the House will have to do the right thing for 24,000 military families.

This motion to recommit instructs the Committee on Appropriations to report the bill back with the cap lifted by \$500 million for a total of \$1.35 billion. This does not incur any additional costs. It simply allows existing funds and other assets to be used for privatization.

The problem seems to be, as Members have pointed out, that CBO wants to charge these privately raised funds against the budget allocation, which does not make any sense to anyone who lives in the real world. Any Member who has visited a military base and seen family housing knows this is a real need. Raising the cap enjoys broad support on both sides of the aisle and the White House.

I urge Members to join in support of this motion to recommit and give military families the decent housing they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, to those who would cite the action taken by the House yesterday on the authorization bill, I would simply say that was not a substantive fix. That was a political fix, which is going nowhere because there is no assurance whatsoever that that bill will pass. This bill is a must-pass vehicle. That is why this provision ought to be attached to this bill.